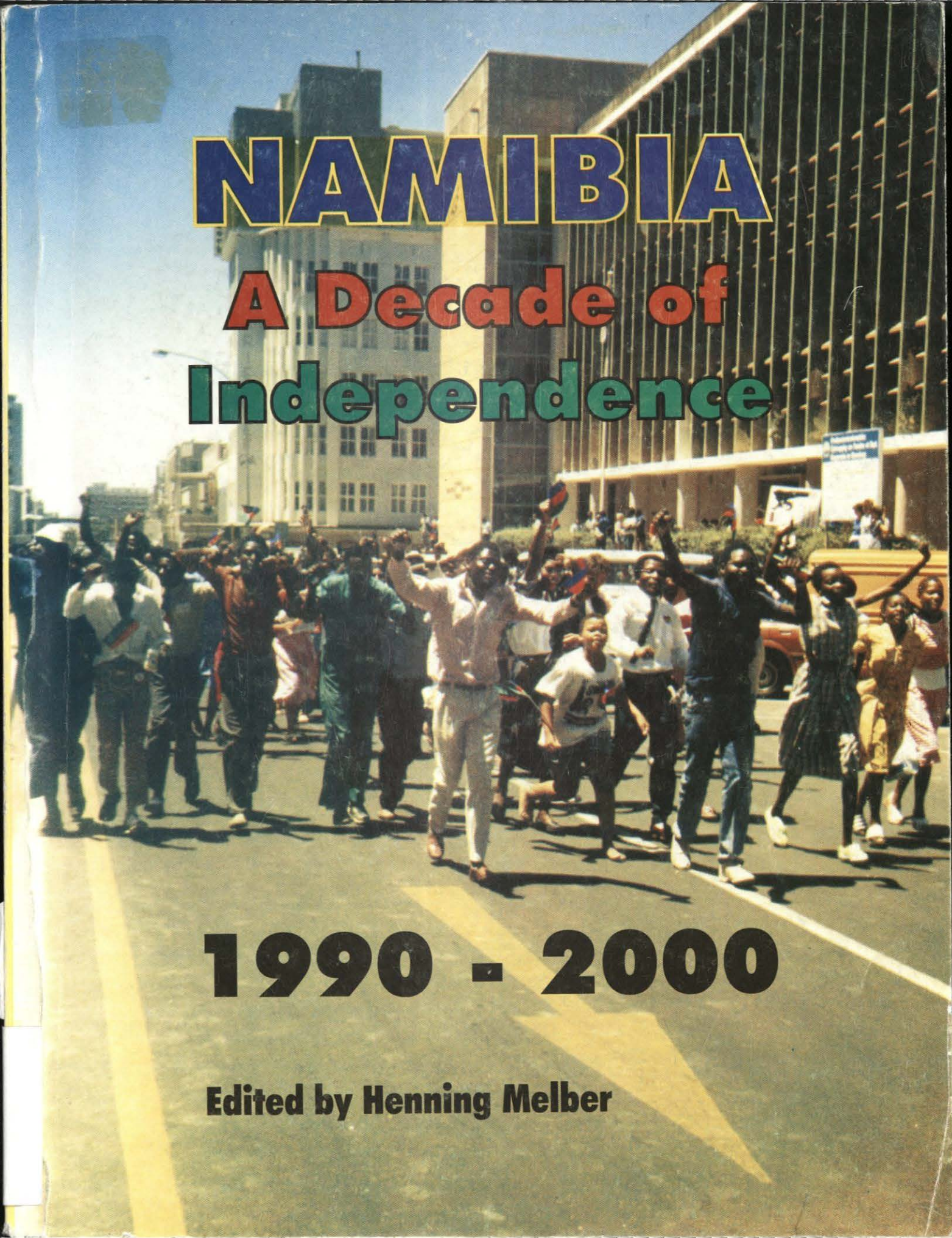

NAMIBIA

A Decade of Independence

1990 - 2000

Edited by Henning Melber

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NEPRU Publication No. 7

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This publication has been made possible with funds provided by the

Hanns Seidel Foundation and the African Capacity Building Foundation.

Technical editing for this volume: Aldenia Chaka.

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ISBN 99916-38-05-9

First published in 2000 by the Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit,
P.O. Box 40710, Ausspannplatz, Windhoek, Namibia

Cover Photos: Henning Melber

Printed and bound in Namibia by Nation Press

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PREFACE

The Republic of Namibia and the Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit (NEPRU) have both around the same time reached the age of ten years. For us as an autonomous think tank this is a challenge and opportunity to take stock in several ways. We have done so with regard to our own institution in a comprehensive separate, both descriptive and analytical overview just published (*"NEPRU - The First Ten Years. A Review of One Decade Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit, 1990-2000"*).

We now present our efforts to describe, summarise and analyse some relevant aspects of Namibia's socio-economic and political developments during this first decade. The picture painted is not complete, but its contours and colours are nonetheless visible. More efforts need to be undertaken in future years, though, to further illustrate and understand the complex social reality of a post-colonial society in transition. Time shall also show in transition to which destination (if there is any). I hope and trust that the contributions to this volume, as selective and fragmentary they might be, are seen and appreciated as humble beginnings to create sound information for further reflections, provoking and assisting an enlightened debate. We are aware of many shortcomings within this reader but are convinced that it also has its merits as a partial review and assessment of some relevant issues concerning the Namibian state of affairs.

The chapters were finalised during the first months of this year, trying to be as much up to date as possible. This challenge could not have been met without the full commitment of all the contributors (who bear the sole responsibility for the contents of their individual chapters). The task could furthermore be only accomplished with the additional support rendered by a number of people who readily delivered extra efforts in support of the project. Among the many, I would like to gratefully mention at NEPRU the special and extraordinary assistance offered by Deena Chaka for the technical editing, as well as the support by Martha Mogane and Nino Frodema. Jürgen Wolf of Nation Press in Tsumeb did much more than an ordinary, commercially driven job. Last but not least, without the confidence and trust of both, Wolfgang Kleine and F.J. Brinck from the Hanns Seidel Foundation, this book would not have materialised in the true sense of the word.

I take the liberty to end on an even more personal note by devoting my own input to the publication in front of you to my daughter Tulinawa. Six years of age, she is born and brought up as an independent Namibian. Her Oshiwambo name means "I am satisfied". She has been my biggest achievement during the first decade of Namibia's Independence.

Windhoek, March 2000

Henning Melber
(Director of NEPRU, June 1992 to March 2000)

THE POLITICS OF NATION-BUILDING - A THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

Henning Melber

> "All its defects and deseases notwithstanding, the Africa of the 1990s is immeasurably different from the Africa of the 1930s, and in all those ways that signal renewal and creativity, this Africa is also immeasurably more alive." (Basil Davidson, The Black Man's Burden, 1992).

Taking note of the young Namibian sovereign state and its achievements as well as shortcomings since Independence in the further course of this volume[1] , this introductory chapter addresses the issue of the "Politics of Nation-Building" in a wider context[2]. It is based on previous theoretical reflections of experiences and insights also from other African countries[3].

The underlying assumption of the approach is that the "Politics of Nation-Building" though favoured or hampered by material conditions, has by and large an independent dynamic of its own. The emergence of post-colonial African states based on the notion of national identities is not merely a mechanistic result of a socio-political superstructure emanating from a material basis (or the lack thereof). While the dialectical relationship between economy and society is not questioned, it is seen as much more of a complex nature than mistakenly assumed for too long by simplistic orthodox materialist schools of thought.

In this sense, fiscal pragmatism, a much required virtue for most of the African states (including Namibia) is a rather different issue from political (and ideological) nation building. Due to this understanding, this chapter concentrates on the politics of nation building while largely ignoring the political economy (or the critique thereof) of post-colonial societies. It accepts implicitly the given centrality of the state as an agency with a dominant role to play in social organisation. This concurs with the position expressed by Cedergren and Odén (1991: 13), who conclude: "With all its problems, the nation-state is the social order which presents the fewest problems in Africa. There is no alternative organisation for nation-building." The challenge, then, lies in the relationship between state and society and how state seeks to solve the "Hobbesian dilemma" summarised by Sørensen (1996: 913 sq.) as "the insight that the state needs to be both strong and weak. It needs to be strong in order to be able to create domestic order and security; it needs to be weak in the sense of being responsible to society."

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[1] See for an earlier and far less systematic attempt NEPRU 1997

[2] The paper has originally been presented to the Prime Minister's Consultative Conference with Academicians, 27-28 February 1997, and is reproduced here to offer a general theoretical framework for the following, more empirically oriented contributions.

[3] I am especially grateful for the insights gained over the years of continuous collaboration with Reinhart Kössler. Much of this contribution draws on our common work, cf. Melber 1993c, Kössler/Melber 1993 and 1994.